

PrEP



ADVOCACY

BOOKLET 2019



STAYING
SAFE
IS MY
ROLE

ACT NOW
PREP
FOR
SURE

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Backgrounder

This PrEP backgrounder is a tool to provide correct information about PrEP to people at high risk of HIV, to inform and motivate them to seek and utilize PrEP services. The tool provides factual information and key messages to enable potential PrEP users to make informed decisions on whether to use PrEP for HIV prevention. This backgrounder provides factual information and messages to healthcare providers to enable them to identify and offer PrEP services to those who are at high risk of HIV.

This document is also meant to be used by PrEP advocates and educators to sensitize the community on what PrEP is, the benefits of using PrEP and to help identify the most appropriate PrEP users. As different groups of people use this backgrounder to engage communities about PrEP, feedback obtained will help policy makers and program implementers to improve on PrEP service provision in the country.

What is Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)?

PrEP is the use of antiretroviral medication to prevent infection if exposed to HIV. PrEP consists of a pill (drug) that is taken by a person who is HIV negative to reduce his or her risk of becoming HIV positive. Just like other prevention interventions like condoms, Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision, or PMTCT, PrEP works to prevent HIV.

How does PrEP work?

When someone takes medication (drugs) to optimal levels before getting infected, these drugs stop the virus from taking hold in the body.



Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

Pre

• Before

Exposure

• Activity that can lead to HIV infection

Prophylaxis

• Prevention

Anti-malarial



Septin

Nevirapine



Taking PrEP to prevent HIV is similar to taking medication to prevent malaria. People who live in countries where there is no malaria take anti-malarial drugs when they come to Uganda - ***“It is not that they already have malaria”***. The drugs in their body then help them to prevent malaria when they are bitten by mosquitoes.

How do we know that PrEP prevents HIV?

PrEP has been proven to work in clinical trials in different countries throughout the globe including Uganda and other African countries. As PrEP is rolled out in the real world, it is also proving to effectively prevent HIV.

PrEP has worked in different settings including;

- Clinical trials to find out if PrEP prevents HIV were carried out in Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, USA, France and many other countries in the world.
- Demonstration projects to find out if PrEP can work in a real-world setting were also conducted in the same countries.
- These trials were carried out among different groups including sex workers, MSM (gay men), transgender people, injecting drug users and serodiscordant couples.
- With all the evidence that PrEP is safe and effective, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that people at high risk of HIV infection should be offered PrEP for HIV prevention.
- To date, over 65 countries in the world including Uganda, Kenya and others have adopted PrEP for HIV prevention.
- More than 350,000 people are using PrEP globally, with up to 12,000 of these in Uganda. UNAIDS estimates 3 million people globally qualify as potential PrEP users.



Why PrEP and why now?

PrEP is an additional HIV prevention method for people at high risk. PrEP can be especially good for women who no longer have to rely on men for HIV protection.

PrEP has been proven safe and highly effective in preventing HIV infection. In fact, when taken correctly, PrEP reduces HIV risk by more than 90 percent. Now that we know that PrEP works well, we need to make it available to those who need it. We also need to inform and sensitize people about PrEP so that they are able to decide if PrEP is the best HIV prevention choice for them. We know:

- PrEP has been proven to be highly effective in preventing HIV infection.
- PrEP is safe and can be used by both males and females at high risk of HIV infection.
- PrEP is an additional HIV prevention intervention. Now people who had challenges with other HIV prevention methods can benefit from PrEP.
- Now we have a woman-controlled HIV prevention method. With PrEP, women do not have to depend on the male partners for protection.
- PrEP can be used with other prevention interventions such as Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision and treatment.

What are the benefits of PrEP?

These include for use:

- In the prevention of HIV.
- In discordant couples who want to conceive.
- As a bridge to ART among serodiscordant couples before the positive person is virally suppressed.
- As a “discrete” way to protect oneself from HIV without having to tell anyone.
- For use during periods of high risk.
- For use along with methods for family planning, like with condoms.



Who qualifies for PrEP?

PrEP is for people at “substantial risk of HIV.” According to the World Health organization, this is anyone in a community or sexual network with an HIV incidence greater than 3 percent per year. In Uganda this usually includes people in an HIV serodiscordant relationship, sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, people who inject drugs, fisher folks, adolescent girls and young women, among others.

- ❧ PrEP is only for HIV negative people confirmed by a recent HIV test.
- ❧ One qualifies to take PrEP if s/he has a normal functioning kidney confirmed by a test (creatinine clearance test).
- ❧ PrEP is for those who have taken a decision to use PrEP to prevent HIV infection.

Where can I access PrEP?

The Ministry of Health in Uganda adopted a phased approach of rolling out PrEP in the country. Uganda started with six (6) sites in 2017, expanding to seventeen (17) sites in 2018 and an additional 73 sites will be initiated in 2019. This means that PrEP is not available in all healthcare facilities in the country. In Uganda;

- ❧ PrEP can be accessed for free from facilities accredited by the Ministry of Health.
- ❧ Accredited facilities also offer PrEP services on outreach basis.
- ❧ **Important to note is that one needs to access PrEP from a trained healthcare provider. The Ministry of Health and partners provide this tailored training as part of the phased expansion of PrEP rollout.**



Does PrEP come with possible side effects?

Just like any other drugs, the body may initially react to taking PrEP.

As the body gets used to the drugs, these reactions usually fade.

- PrEP is safe and well tolerated by most people using it.
- Some people experience some mild side effects when they have just started using PrEP but these go away within a month as the body adjusts. Some of the side effects experienced by people who start using PrEP include:
 - Stomach discomfort
 - Headache
 - Nausea
 - Dizziness
- PrEP use should be monitored for the more rare but severe side effects that might affect
 - Kidney function
 - Liver health
 - Bone density

PrEP does not usually cause drug resistance in people who take it consistently and get tested for HIV while on it.

How is PrEP related to other HIV prevention packages?

- PrEP is an HIV prevention method like condoms and Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision.
- Like other interventions, PrEP is part of the combination prevention package. It's an additional method to existing ones like condoms, Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision and viral load suppression in people living with HIV.
- PrEP is safer sex.
- PrEP doesn't prevent other STIs and pregnancy so it's important to use other methods to prevent these while using PrEP.
- PrEP can only offer protection from HIV when it's used correctly and consistently. There is no ongoing protection



- from PrEP when someone stops taking it.
- PrEP does not protect against STIs but PrEP programs regularly screen for and treat STIs. These programs could eventually decrease rates of STIs in communities with high PrEP uptake.

PrEP and condoms

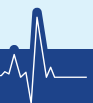
- PrEP is not a replacement for condoms. It's an additional method that can be used for HIV prevention for people who cannot use condoms correctly and consistently.
- Both PrEP and condoms are effective methods for HIV prevention if used correctly and consistently.
- PrEP can be used along with condoms because it only offers protection from HIV but not for other STIs while condoms can offer protection from other STIs and unplanned pregnancies.

PrEP and Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART)

- PrEP is taken by HIV negative people before exposure to HIV and ART is taken as treatment by those who are living with HIV.
- Both PrEP and ART involve the use of ARVs. As of 2019, the only PrEP drug regimen consists of the ARV tenofovir.
- PrEP is taken for HIV prevention during periods of high risk and can be stopped when HIV risk decreases. ART is taken for life.
- Adherence (taking the drugs consistently) to the PrEP drug is very important for PrEP or ART to be effective whether taking the drugs as prevention or for treatment.

PrEP and PEP

- Both PrEP and PEP are taken by HIV negative people.
- PrEP is taken before exposure to HIV while PEP is taken for a specified period shortly after possible exposure to HIV.
- PrEP is taken during periods of high risk which can be months or years while PEP is taken in an emergency



situation, every day for only 28 days and must be started within 72 hours (3 days) after possible exposure.

- ARVs are used in both PrEP and PEP; however, the dosage and drug combinations are different. PrEP is a two-drug regimen-containing tenofovir, usually in combination with emtricitabine but not always. PEP contains more ARVs than those in a PrEP regimen.

PrEP and Stigma

PrEP is an HIV prevention option just like condoms and other methods. Everyone has the right to choose the option that he/she prefers or works best for that person. Just like when you go to the clinic to buy condoms and some people judge or perceive you in their own way, this may happen with PrEP. It is important to note that it's your life and you have the right to decide how you protect yourself.

- PrEP does not lead to promiscuity.
- Some people who take PrEP may face some stigma from service providers or the community. This may be due to negative perceptions of members from key populations who have high levels of HIV in their communities.
- The packaging of PrEP and ART is the same so some people find it stigmatizing to be mistaken and/or associated with people living with HIV.
- PrEP is often provided in the same space as ART and this causes some stigma.
- Judgmental service providers perceive PrEP users as leading reckless lives.

How much does it cost?

- PrEP is offered for free at all accredited facilities in the country like MARPI in Mulago Hospital, Ice Breaker Uganda, IDI-Kasangati, Rubaare Health Centre IV, Mukono Health Centre IV, and other health care facilities in Fort Portal, Ntungamo, Gulu, Kabale, Rakai, Isingiro, Dokolo, Ibanda, Sheema, Kayunga, Kanungu and Kiruhura etc.
- Just like how you move to a public healthcare facility and ask for condoms, if a facility is offering PrEP, it's your right to



- walk in and talk to the service provider about PrEP.
- Remember not everyone can use PrEP. Your discussion with the service provider will help determine whether PrEP is the best choice for HIV prevention for you.
- PrEP averts HIV infections so it is potentially cost-saving by avoiding life-time ARV costs for those who would have seroconverted.

Duration of PrEP use?

Individuals decide what method to use for HIV prevention. People's choices for HIV prevention may also change with time.

- PrEP is not taken for life like ART for treatment. PrEP is taken during periods of high risk of HIV infection.
- PrEP does not work like an emergency pill. According to the National technical guidance on PrEP, one needs to take the drug 7 consecutive days before exposure to HIV for rectal exposure and 21 days for vaginal exposure to have sufficient drugs in the body to stop HIV infection (The WHO recommends only 7 days before vaginal exposure).
- After 7/21 days you need to continue taking PrEP every day while at risk to maintain sufficient drug levels in the body to prevent HIV infection.
- When you decide to stop taking PrEP, you need to be assessed by a health worker and advised on when and how to stop PrEP.

So what?

- Policy makers need to develop a comprehensive PrEP communication strategy following extensive consultations and engagements with all stakeholders including key and priority populations.
- Health workers need to integrate provision of PrEP as part of combination HIV prevention and sexual reproductive health and rights services giving sufficient information about the relationship of PrEP and other HIV prevention interventions and SRHR services.
- Advocates need to build a persuasive case for



comprehensive HIV prevention for adolescent girls and young women and use this to lobby and change opinions, priorities (financial and programmatic), policies and/or programs for HIV prevention for adolescent girls and young women to avert the numbers of new HIV infections among AGYW.



If one is at substantial risk and may benefit from PrEP services, please ask your health care provider about PrEP services, or call these toll-free numbers for more information.

- ■ Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre
0800311222

- ■ Ask without shame
0800203063

- ■ Baylor Uganda
0800205555/0800244255

- ■ SALT helpline
0800100330

- ■ Spectrum Uganda
0800100040





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